The Importance of DHA Beyond Infancy


Docosahexaenoic acid, DHA, is an omega-3 fatty acid that is found throughout the body. More specifically, it is an important structural fat in the brain and eyes and a key component of the heart. A growing body of research continues to support the role that DHA plays in maintaining good health throughout life. DHA is important for brain and eye development and function throughout the lifecycle. DHA plays a critical role during the first years of life as it continues to be important for the support of optimal visual and cognitive outcomes. 11 Below are research highlights from studies examining the role of DHA in health and development in early life.

• DHA is the predominant omega-3 fatty acid found in the brain. DHA represents about 97% of all omega-3 fatty acids in the brain and 93% of all the omega-3 fatty acids in the eye (retina). 6,7

• Uptake of preformed DHA by the brain is significant between ages 2 and 5 and supports the substantial accumulation of DHA by the brain during this critical growth period. 11

• Including DHA in the diet is associated with higher scores on tests of visual and neural development in infants and children. 12

• Many people believe that eating foods like flax and walnuts will provide all the omega-3 fatty acids they need, however, these foods are sources of another omega-3 fatty acid called alpha-linolenic acid, or ALA. The body's production of DHA from ALA is limited. 8,9

• Including preformed DHA in the diet is the most reliable way to ensure that DHA is available to support optimal brain and eye development and function. 10,11

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